

GARFIELD, LOUP AND WHEELER COUNTIES

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NEBRASKA COMMISSION OF
LAW ENFORCEMENT
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

**THREE YEAR COMPREHENSIVE
JUVENILE SERVICES PLAN**

January 1, 2009 - December 31, 2011

Contact Information:

Trisha Crandall
Director, *GLW Childrens Council, Inc.*
455 Grand Avenue - P.O. Box 310
Burwell, NE 68823
Phone: (308) 346-4284
Fax: (308) 346-5402
tlc@nctc.net

Fiscal Officer:

Linda S. Heermann
Garfield County Clerk
P.O. Box 218
Burwell, NE 68823
Phone (308) 346-4161
Fax (308) 346-4651

County Board Chairs:

Garfield County:

Nancy Polinoski
82822 E. Wagonwheel Rd.
Burwell, NE 68823
(308) 348-5186

Loup County:

Tom McNeil
44933 Long Valley Rd.
Taylor, NE 68879
(308) 942-6285

Wheeler County:

Jack Poulsen
P.O. Box 102
Ericson, NE 68637
(308) 653-3115

County Federal I.D. Numbers

47-6006463

47-6006485

47-6006519

Table of Contents

Part I: Community Descriptions	Page 3
Overview - The Three Counties	Page 4
Garfield County	Page 5
Loup County	Page 9
Wheeler County	Page 13
Part II: Problems and Solutions	Page 17
The Process	Page 18
Problems Identified	Page 20
Risk Factors	Page 25
Protective Factors	Page 30
Gaps/Needs	Page 35
Solutions	Page 39
Part III: Priority Areas & Strategies	Page 42
Problems:	Page 43
Data	Page 45
Priorities/Goals/Strategies/Timeline	Page 47
Evaluation and Sustainability	Page 55
Budget Considerations	Page 56
Part IV: Community Team Members	Page 57

Part I

Community Descriptions

Overview - The Three Counties

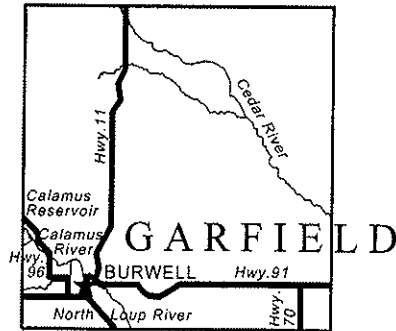
Garfield, Loup and Wheeler counties are located in North-Central Nebraska at the gateway to the Nebraska Sandhills. Each county is nominally twenty-four miles square, so together they form a rectangular strip seventy-two miles long and twenty four miles wide, comprising a land area of some 1,715 square miles and over a million acres.

This is farm and ranch country, and that fact is evident in the lifestyle and economic welfare of the people. Population centers are few and far between. Loup and Garfield Counties each have only a single incorporated town. Wheeler County has two. All three counties face declining populations bases, and all are experiencing economic hard times. Loup and Wheeler Counties are among the 50 poorest counties in the United States, measured by adjusted gross income reported to the Internal Revenue Service on 2000 income tax returns, and Garfield County ranks in the bottom 12 percent among Nebraska counties.

Residents of all three counties are almost entirely (99%) white, born in the United States, and of German, English, Irish and Czech ancestry. Nearly all speak only English at home. As in other rural communities, the population appears to be aging, with median age for both sexes ranges from 40.4 years in Wheeler County to 42.9 in Loup, to 45.9 in Garfield. Median ages in towns are somewhat higher.

Each county supports a public school system consisting of a high school and one or more elementary schools. There are no established private or parochial schools, although a few children are home-schooled. None of the counties is served by any form of public transportation.

Garfield County



Land Area: 570 square miles
Population (1990): 2,141
County Seat: Burwell
County Clerk Address: P.O. Box 218, Burwell, NE 68823, phone (308) 346-4161
Town and Population (1990): Burwell, 1,278.
Public School Districts: Burwell Elementary School, Burwell; Burwell Junior-Senior High School, Burwell; District 70-Garfield County, Burwell; Midvale Public School, Burwell; Richland Public School, Burwell; Riverview Public School, Burwell; Rosehill Public School, Burwell.

Originally a part of Wheeler County, Garfield county was established as a separate legal entity in 1884. Named for assassinated U.S. President James A. Garfield, it is centrally located between Loup County on the west and Wheeler County on its eastern border. Located at the junction of the Calamus and North Loup Rivers, the county seat of Burwell lies at the intersection of State Highways 11 and 91 and the recently designated Highway 96, which runs along the north shore of the Calamus Reservoir.

Population

According to census figures, the county's total population in 2000 was 1,902, a decline of 11.2 percent since 1990 and nearly 30 percent since 1960 and nearly 45 percent since 1940. The population density is now 3.3 persons per square mile. Ladies outnumber gentlemen, with 52.1 percent females vs. 47.9 percent males. Fifty-nine percent of the population, or 1,128 souls, live in Burwell, the county seat.

Industry and Employment

Cattle ranching and farming operations have long been the backbone of the local economy. The Burwell Livestock Market has been an important center for cattle sales for decades. Census figures indicate a total of 198 non-employer

business establishments and 90 private non-farm businesses employing 508 workers in the county in 1999, a slight increase of 1.2% since 1990. Local government entities employed 126 in 1999. Of 102 families with children under the age of six, 84.3 percent reported that all parents in the family were in the labor force.

Tourism

Since construction of the nearby Virginia Smith Dam and Calamus Reservoir was completed in 1985, tourism and recreation have become increasingly important to the local economy, as the area seeks to attract visitors to enjoy lake and river activities and visit historical sites such as nearby Fort Hartsuff, in adjoining Valley County. Nebraska's Big Rodeo, a four-day event held during the county fair every summer, draws visitors from many states.

Wage and Income Levels

Family income levels in Garfield County are relatively low. Census figures, which include families not required to file tax returns, put 1999 median household income for Burwell residents at \$22,569. Average adjusted gross income reported on federal tax returns filed in 2000 was \$28,110, placing Garfield County among the poorest Nebraska counties, in the 88th percentile. Wage earners in the county fared even worse, ranking in the bottom two percent with average wages and salaries of \$15,998.

Standard of Living

In 1999, 9.7 percent of the overall population and 13.0 percent of families with children under five years of age were living below the federally determined poverty level, compared with a statewide average of 9.7 percent. A new study released in November, 2002 by the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest introduces a Self-Sufficiency Standard which documents the cost

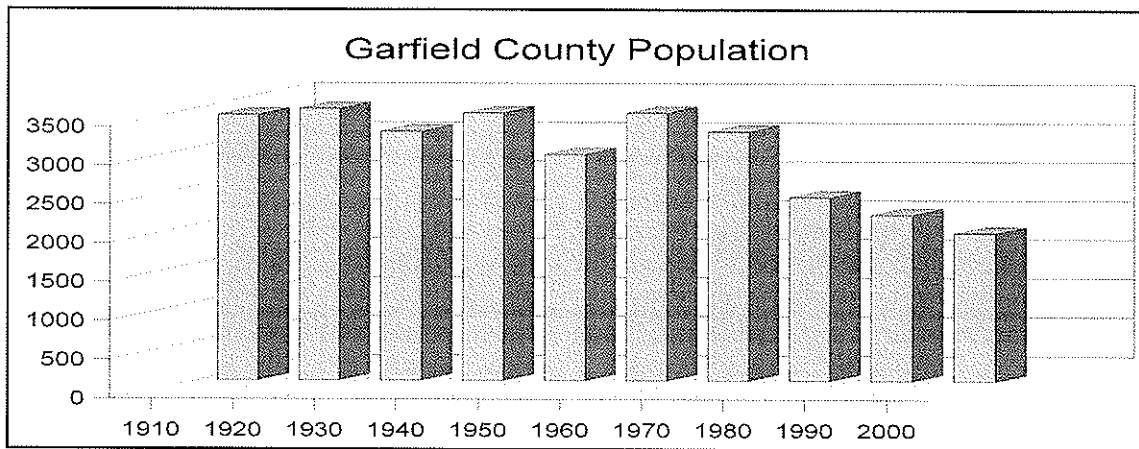
of living which families must meet to live independently, without public or private assistance. The study concludes that "for most parents, earnings that are well above the official poverty level are nevertheless far below what they need to meet their families' basic needs." For Garfield county, the study estimates that a single adult needs a wage of \$5.61 per hour, or \$11,845 annually, to meet this standard of self-sufficiency. For an adult with an infant and a preschooler, the standard rises to \$9.96 per hour, or \$21,038 per year. Adding an additional school age child means the parent will need a \$14.59 hourly wage or \$30,819 each year to make ends meet. That figure is nearly twice the average wage in the Burwell area.

Medical Care

The local hospital, traditionally one of the area's largest employers, ceased operations in 1989, and the facility now houses a nursing home and assisted living center. Medical needs of residents are met by a resident physician and a satellite clinic associated with the Ord Family Health Center, located 17 miles Southeast of Burwell, in Valley County.

Education and Schools

2000 census figures show that 81.1 percent of the adult (over 25) population are high school graduates, and 13.4 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. 23.5 percent of the population is under 18 years of age. Of 437 children over the age of three enrolled in school in 2000, 44 were attending preschool and kindergarten, 362 were enrolled in elementary or secondary schools, and 31 were college or graduate students. The county's only Junior-Senior High School and its largest elementary school are located in Burwell.



1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
3417	3496	3207	3444	2912	3444	3207	2363	2141	1902

Source: U.S. Census Data

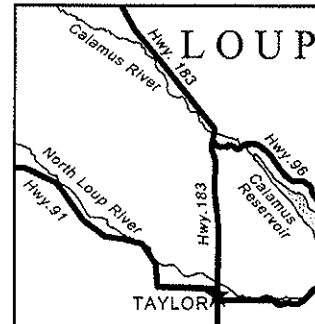
Table 39
The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Garfield County, NE, 2002

Monthly Costs	Adult	Adult + infant	Adult + preschooler	Adult + infant preschooler	Adult + schoolage teenager	Adult + infant schoolage	2 Adults + infant preschooler	2 Adults + preschooler schoolage
Housing	326	416	416	416	416	532	416	416
Child Care	0	335	259	594	259	853	594	518
Food	178	261	270	351	442	472	504	554
Transportation	203	208	208	208	208	208	408	408
Health Care	76	176	176	184	206	198	220	225
Miscellaneous	78	140	133	175	153	226	214	212
Taxes	125	128	123	154	119	331	302	249
Earned Income								
Tax Credit (-)	0	-148	-161	-194	-254	-23	-52	-70
Child Care								
Tax Credit (-)	0	-36	-27	-43	-15	-80	-78	-69
Child Tax Credit (-)	0	-50	-50	-92	-64	-150	-100	-100
Self-Sufficiency Wage								
-Hourly	\$5.61	\$8.13	\$7.65	\$9.96	\$8.36	\$14.59	\$6.90	\$6.65
-Monthly	\$987	\$1,430	\$1,347	\$1,753	\$1,472	\$2,568	\$2,429	\$2,342
-Annual	\$11,845	\$17,162	\$16,159	\$21,038	\$17,659	\$30,819	\$29,151	\$28,103

Source: *The Self Sufficiency Standard for Nebraska*, November 2002

Loup County

Land Area: 570 square miles
Population (1990): 683
County Seat: Taylor
County Clerk Address: P.O. Box 187, Taylor, NE 68879, phone (308) 942-3135
Towns and Population (1990): Almeria, unincorporated; Taylor, 186.
Public School Districts: Loup County Public Schools, Taylor.



With its county seat at Taylor, located on the scenic North Loup River at the junction of State Highways 183 and 91, Loup County was formally organized in 1883, about ten years after white settlers first arrived in the area. Although settlements once existed at Kent and Almeria, Taylor is the county's only remaining village.

Population

The population of Loup County, once as high as 2,188 in 1910, dipped to 683 in 1990, and then rebounded slightly to 712 in the 2000 census, a 4.2 percent increase. With approximately 570 square miles in the county, the population density is only 1.2 persons per square mile. Men have a slight numerical advantage over women, with 52.1 percent of the population. The ladies, of course, make up the other 47.9 percent. 207 people listed the Village of Taylor as their home in the most recent census count.

Business and Employment

Loup County residents depend upon agriculture for their livelihood. Only *eight* private, non-farm businesses were left in Loup County in 1999, along with 37 non-employer establishments listed as of 1998. The county has no medical

facilities. Taylor's only grocery store closed in 2001, leaving only a service station/convenience store to serve the needs of area residents. Private non-farm employment dropped a whopping 36.8 percent from 1990 to 1999, leaving only 12 people employed in private non-farm businesses in the entire county. Local government employed the equivalent of 44 full-time workers.

Wages and Income

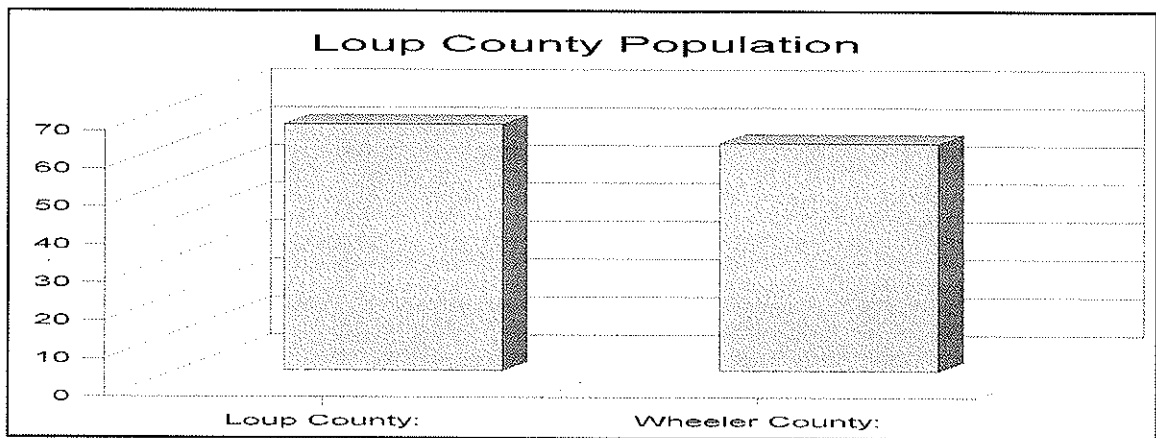
Economic data for Loup County is not encouraging. On the basis of income and earnings, Loup residents are among the poorest in the nation. 72.7 percent of all families with children under six years of age report that all parents in the family were part of the labor force. Still, based on federal income tax returns filed in 2000, average family Adjusted Gross Income was \$18,923, placing the county in the bottom one percent in the state. Wage and salary income, averaging only \$11,753, was also in the bottom percentile. In fact, *Loup County ranked 6th from the bottom in adjusted gross income among all counties in the United States, and 4th from the bottom in wages and salaries reported to IRS in 2000.* Area news media reported that the county had the very lowest per capita income in the entire country. Low income does not mean low expenses, though. To add insult to injury for tenants, average rents and royalties ranked among the *highest* in the state, in the top three percent.

Standard of Living

In view of the previous paragraph, it may not be surprising that one in seven families (14.2%), one out of every four (25%) families with children under five years of age, and 17.7% of all residents were living below the federal poverty level in 1999. The average Loup County worker earned less than the minimum amount needed to support a single adult and barely one-third of the amount needed for a family with two children, applying 2002 Self-Sufficiency Standards established by the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest.

Education and Schools

Loup County takes pride in its public school system, although of course, enrollment numbers are low due to the small population base. A total of 168 students over the age of three were enrolled in school in 2000. Of these, 24 were attending preschool and kindergarten, 89 were in elementary school, and high school enrollment was 47. Eight students were enrolled in college or graduate school. 91.8 percent of the adult (over 25) population completed high school or higher, and 13.3 percent had earned at least a bachelor's degree.



1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
2188	1946	1818	1777	1348	1097	854	859	683	712

Source: U.S. Census Data

Table 60
The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Loup County, NE, 2002

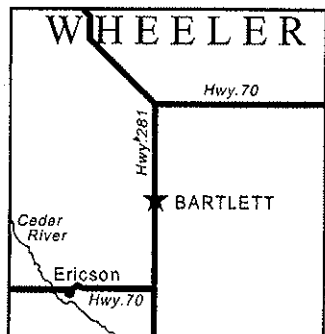
Monthly Costs	Adult	Adult + infant	Adult + preschooler	Adult + infant preschooler	Adult + schoolage teenager	Adult + infant preschooler schoolage	2 Adults + infant preschooler	2 Adults + preschooler schoolage
<i>Housing</i>	326	416	416	416	416	532	416	416
<i>Child Care</i>	0	335	259	594	259	853	594	518
<i>Food</i>	178	261	270	351	442	472	504	554
<i>Transportation</i>	203	208	208	208	208	208	408	408
<i>Health Care</i>	76	176	176	184	206	198	220	225
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	78	140	133	175	153	226	214	212
<i>Taxes</i>	125	128	123	154	119	331	302	255
<i>Earned Income</i>								
<i>Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	-148	-161	-194	-254	-23	-52	-69
<i>Child Care</i>								
<i>Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	-36	-27	-43	-15	-80	-78	-69
<i>Child Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	-50	-50	-92	-64	-150	-100	-100
<i>Self-Sufficiency Wage</i>								
<i>-Hourly</i>	\$5.61	\$8.13	\$7.65	\$9.96	\$8.36	\$14.59	\$6.90 per adult	\$6.67 per adult
<i>-Monthly</i>	\$987	\$1,430	\$1,347	\$1,753	\$1,472	\$2,568	\$2,429	\$2,349
<i>-Annual</i>	\$11,845	\$17,162	\$16,159	\$21,038	\$17,659	\$30,819	\$29,151	\$28,186

Page 74

2002 - The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Nebraska

Source: *The Self Sufficiency Standard for Nebraska*, November 2002

Wheeler County



Land Area: 575 square miles
Population (1990): 948
County Seat: Bartlett
County Clerk Address: P.O. Box 127, Bartlett, NE 68622, phone (308) 654-3235
Towns and Population (1990): Bartlett, 131; Cummingsville, unincorporated; Ericson, 111.
Public School Districts: Wheeler Central Schools, Bartlett.

Originally composed of government lands including the area now known as Garfield County, Wheeler County was established in 1881. The county seat of Bartlett is located in the center of the county on State Highway 281, while the Village of Ericson lies south and west near the Cedar River on Highway 70.

Population

As in Garfield and Loup Counties to the east, the second half of the 20th Century saw declining population and disappearing towns in Wheeler County. From a high level of 2531 in 1920, the population fell below 1000 in the 1980 census, and by 2000, numbers had dwindled to 886, or 1.5 persons per square mile. Just over half of all residents (51 percent) are female. Twenty-six percent live in two incorporated villages with 128 people making their homes in Bartlett, the county seat, while Ericson has 104 inhabitants.

Business and Employment

According to census information for the county, eighteen private non-farm establishments had a total of 98 paid employees in 1999, a decline of nearly one-third since 1990. All parents in the family were in the work force in 81.2 percent of families with children under the age of six, Sixty-six non-employer establishments were recorded in 1998. Local government provided forty-six full-

time equivalent jobs. The county lacks medical facilities, and does not have a resident physician.

Wages and Income

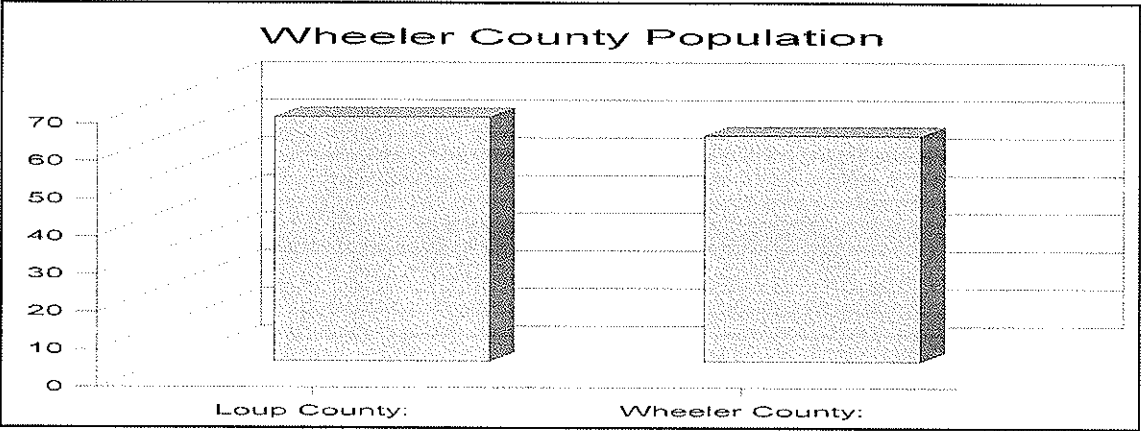
When it comes to economic difficulty, unfortunately, Wheeler County residents have much in common with their counterparts in Loup County to the west. Federal income tax returns filed in 2000 show Wheeler County families ranked in the bottom one percent of Nebraska counties with average adjusted gross income of \$22,403, and in the bottom two percent with respect to earned income, with wages and salaries averaging \$16,625. As a result, Wheeler was number 38 of the bottom 50 U.S. Counties in the year 2000. Rural families were a bit less fortunate than their village neighbors, as 1999 median household incomes were higher in town, with Bartlett averaging \$33,250 and Ericson \$25,278. Rents and royalty levels across the county, on the other hand, were in the top five percent of Nebraska counties..

Standard of Living

Although the average 1999 wage earner in Wheeler County earned a bit more than his or her counterpart in Garfield and Loup Counties, that wage income was barely adequate to sustain an adult and a preschool child according to Self-Sufficiency Standards published in November, 2002. It was just 57 percent of the amount needed to support a family of two adults with an infant and a preschooler. Census data shows that 15.4 percent of all families in the county were living below the federal poverty level in 1999. This number rises to 21 percent for families with related children under 18 years of ages. A shocking 39.1 percent of families with related preschool children (under 5 years of age) lived in poverty in 1999.

Education and Schools

14.9 percent of Wheeler County residents over 25 years of age hold bachelor's degrees or higher, while 90.8 percent completed high school or its equivalent. 236 children over the age of three are enrolled in school, with 23 in preschool and kindergarten, 196 in elementary and high schools, and 17 attending college or graduate school.



	1910	1920	1930	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
	2292	2531	2335	2170	1526	1297	1051	1060	948	886

Source: U.S. Census Data

Table 92
The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wheeler County, NE, 2002

Monthly Costs	Adult	Adult + infant	Adult + preschooler	Adult + infant preschooler	Adult + schoolage teenager	Adult + infant preschooler schoolage	2 Adults + infant preschooler	2 Adults + preschooler schoolage
<i>Housing</i>	326	416	416	416	416	533	416	416
<i>Child Care</i>	0	335	259	594	259	853	594	518
<i>Food</i>	178	261	270	351	442	472	504	554
<i>Transportation</i>	203	208	208	208	208	208	408	408
<i>Health Care</i>	75	172	172	180	202	195	216	221
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	78	139	133	175	153	226	214	212
<i>Taxes</i>	125	128	124	153	118	329	301	252
<i>Earned Income</i>								
<i>Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	-149	-162	-195	-255	-24	-53	-70
<i>Child Care</i>								
<i>Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	-35	-27	-42	-14	-80	-77	-69
<i>Child Tax Credit (-)</i>	0	-50	-50	-91	-63	-150	-100	-100
<i>Self-Sufficiency Wage</i>								
<i>-Hourly</i>	\$5.60	\$8.10	\$7.63	\$9.93	\$8.33	\$14.56	\$6.88 <i>per adult</i>	\$6.65 <i>per adult</i>
<i>-Monthly</i>	\$985	\$1,425	\$1,342	\$1,748	\$1,466	\$2,562	\$2,423	\$2,341
<i>-Annual</i>	\$11,824	\$17,099	\$16,108	\$20,977	\$17,597	\$30,742	\$29,074	\$28,095

Page 90

2002 - The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Nebraska

Source: *The Self-Sufficiency Standard for Nebraska, November 2002*

Part II

Problems and Solutions

The Process

To determine the scope of the project and identify the problems to be addressed, team members and the Project Planning Director conducted a series of meetings with groups representing a variety of perspectives on juvenile issues. Advertised public meetings were held in each community. Within each county, the director met personally with numerous groups to receive input, including:

Law and Law Enforcement: County Attorneys, District and County (Juvenile Court) Judges, Sheriffs, City Police and Probation Officers

Government Officials: County Commissioners and Municipal Officials

Educators and School Officials: Principals, Superintendents, Teachers, Guidance Counselors, School Prevention Officers

Clergy & Church Leaders: Ministers and Church Youth Advisors

Counselors and Social Service Providers: Investigators and Case Workers, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Counselors

Students: High School Government Classes, Student Councils, GLW Youth Advisory Board, Extracurricular Groups, Church Youth Groups, 4-H Clubs,

GLW Children's Council: Local Evaluator, GLW Board of Directors and members

Wraparound: School and Community-based Wraparound Program Coordinators

Community Leaders:

Community Food Pantry: Members

Meeting format varied to suit the participants. Some were chalkboard “brainstorming” sessions, while others involved more individualized questioning. Participants were asked to respond to the same question asked three years ago, *what are the most important actions we can take to create the future we want for our youth, ourselves, and our communities?*” In many groups, participants were asked to give written responses to key phrases used in this plan, including:

Problems and Concerns
Risks that contribute to the problem
Protective factors - things that help already
Gaps - in ourselves, families or communities
Needs - things that are needed to solve the problem or concern

Results were used to focus further discussion and begin to establish priorities and formulate solutions for the problems which were identified.

Problems Identified

A number of issues were identified as problems affecting youth in all three counties. The issues often overlap, and have been grouped into three priority groups:

A. Awareness and Access to Activities and Services

Every group highlighted the scarcity of businesses, services and activities in these three counties. Many participants mentioned the need to travel great distances at times to obtain necessary services, purchase goods and supplies, and find entertainment and recreation. Neither Loup or Wheeler Counties has a resident doctor or attorney. None of the three counties has an emergency medical center or an acute-care hospital. At-risk juveniles dealing with lifestyle and health issues such as substance abuse, truancy, premature sexual activity and pregnancy, gender identification issues, underage tobacco use and eating disorders often must travel significant distances to neighboring counties to receive assistance. Education on the above problems is limited due to school schedules and dollars for new curriculum or training and adult perception of the problems. There is little knowledge of brain development among the youth and the results of their actions. Parents are wanting this knowledge for better understanding.

Due to economic and geographic limitations, support services and activities for at-risk youth and their parents are often limited within the three-county area. Affordable after school programs and day care are limited and youth are often left unsupervised. Supervised activities, outside of sports or church, are nonexistent except for Wednesday night church.

Receiving a Drug Free Community Grant in 2008 enabled a central office to open in 2008 for GLW Children's Council. Fully staffed, it is located in Burwell, Garfield county, between the other two counties. This office now serves as a clearinghouse for information on services and activities available to youth, including legal, medical and social services as well as opportunities for recreation, social interaction and community service. The Director and Assistant are available to provide individual assessment and assistance, and coordinate referrals to existing agencies, service providers and mental health professionals as needed. This service was noted as a need in the 2006-2008 Juvenile Service Plan. This office can provide, coordinate and facilitate Town Hall Meetings, educational programs and materials but is not able to provide the needed direct services.

Although SICA (State Incentive Cooperative Agreement) funding has ended; Region 3 Behavioral Health Services is providing State Block Funds to provide a half time Prevention Coordinator in each of the three county schools to implement activities and science based curriculum. There is still a need for full time Prevention Coordinators in each county.

When reviewing the risk factors noted in the Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey, all participants agreed on a need to work on education of risks, low commitment to school, family management and favorable attitudes concerning alcohol use.

B. Supervision, Accountability and Skill Development

A second theme expressed in all three counties relates to the inability or unwillingness of some parents to supervise their children and hold them accountable for unacceptable behavior, or to provide wholesome examples and

instruction in basic life skills. Minors are frequently required to assume adult responsibilities such as cooking, home maintenance and child care, for which they are ill-equipped and unprepared. Education in basics of home management, beginning at an early age would lead to more stable families.

In every adult focus group, lack of parental supervision and involvement in the lives of children was identified as a significant problem. A related problem facing many parents of young children is the unavailability of affordable day care. Whether failure of supervision stems from a scarcity of day care providers, economic pressures requiring parents to work extended hours or shifts outside the home, illness or disability, substance abuse, or from irresponsible or immature behavior on the part of the parent, the result is that children are left to fend for themselves, often assuming responsibility for maintaining the household, cooking, cleaning, and caring for younger siblings or their own children. There is a concern for the time spent on TV, *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *YouTube* and other social networking avenues by many of the youth. Parents and teachers are looking for more education on these topics. An after school program would be able to provide educational material about abuse issues for both youth and their parents as well as holding educational meetings with parents/families. A priority established is for an after school program in Garfield county; coordinating with the grade school as to the needs. The goal is to offer a free after school program as many of the youth who need supervision are from low-income families and are now home, alone, and unsupervised. A program was offered sever years ago for \$15.00 per month but many of our low income families found even this much too much for their budgets. This would also be a wonderful addition to Loup & Wheeler Counties but the school bus service limits time when youth are available before returning home.

There is a need for low-cost, individualized programs to assist parents

and young people to acquire skills necessary to improve employment opportunities, avoid financial pitfalls and live healthier lives. Principal topics might include improving parenting skills, dealing with special problems facing children of divorce, budget management and check writing, the dangers of social networking and anger management. Employment-related skills such as resume writing, interviewing and personal presentation would be especially useful. Some clients need help with very basic skills such as survival cooking and personal hygiene.

All three county schools participate in the Nebraska risk and Protective Factor Student survey administered in the schools in 2003, 2005, & 2007. At least 90% of the students in grades 6th, 8th, 10th & 12th have participated. This has been a great way for GLWCC to track the progress of the strategies we have implemented. As we move forward we have discovered that more evaluation is needed for state and federal grants as well as a closer evaluation of each strategy and of parent and community reactions and thoughts. A Local Evaluator was hired in 2008, on a part time basis, and is available to help accomplish this priority and to devise survey instruments that will help us track progress. There is a need to discover "How do we know it's working and that we are making a difference?"

C. Law Enforcement Issues

Participants in every community found some fault with existing law enforcement efforts and yet understand the financial strain on the counties to add more law enforcement and the strain on the law enforcement officers who are often acting on their own.. Not surprisingly, alcohol and drugs were a major concern. In Loup and Wheeler counties, where law enforcement has been limited to a single officer in each county, patrons expressed frustration with a

perceived lack of success in solving a number of vandalism and theft incidents and reporting and arrests of underage drinking participants..

Virtually every contributor acknowledged that the use/abuse of alcohol and controlled substances by minors is a serious concern in its own right, and a contributing factor in many other problem situations. The 2008 Nebraska Epidemiology Report noted three concerns; binge drinking, driving in a car with a drunk driver and riding in a car while drinking. Theft and vandalism by juvenile offenders was cited as a problem in two of the three counties. Teenage driving habits and offenses such as speeding and careless driving were seen as problems, along with youth-involved vehicle accidents. Patrons were concerned about perceived inadequate or ineffective law enforcement efforts and a general lack of respect for persons and property on the part of some young people. They were also concerned about county budgets and the cost of legal counsel for juvenile offenders as the majority come from families that need a court appointed lawyer. A Diversion Program for Juvenile Offenders , designed by the three county attorneys, judges and law enforcement would help to alleviate these problems.

More effective methods are needed to prevent and deal with unlawful and/or dangerous behaviors by youth, including early intervention for at-risk youth, alternatives to court-ordered criminal sanctions in cases involving minor or first-time offenses (juvenile diversion), and improved law enforcement. Enhancement of law enforcement visibility is needed and this could be accomplished with the addition of part time personnel that would be available to spend more time on education with area youth in the schools, participate in GLW Children's council media campaigns concerning the abuse of ATOD;s, supervising youth dances and events, more patrols during the Rodeo weekend as well as patrols around the county roads during graduation and prom time.

Risk Factors

Discussions among participants were wide-ranging and unstructured. In many respects it was difficult to distinguish between the definition of a problem and discussion of its associated risk factors. Restated and combined, the following risk factors were identified:

1. Underage Drinking. The consumption of alcohol by minors, the ease with which it can be obtained, the willingness of otherwise law-abiding adults to make it available to teenagers and even younger children, the fact that beer is often cheaper to purchase than soda pop, peer pressures to conform, cultural emphasis on the use of alcohol in social situations, a need or desire to deaden emotional pain or release inhibitions - it all adds up to a huge problem in Garfield, Loup and Wheeler counties, as it is everywhere else. Kids drink for many of the same reasons that adults do - but at an age when attitudes and habits are being formed that will affect them and our communities for decades to come. The 2008 Nebraska Epidemiology Report listed three areas for concern; binge drinking, drinking while driving and riding with a drunk driver. All have proved to be a concern in our three counties.

2. Attitude Toward Alcohol. Teenagers' attitudes toward alcohol consumption are modeled on behavior they have witnessed at home, in the community and in the mass media. All too often, substance use/abuse is a problem at home and parents lack the maturity, strength or moral authority to advise or instruct their children to avoid underage drinking. Some parents suffer from a form of denial, choosing to "look the other way", or refusing to acknowledge the fact that their children are involved with alcohol. Particularly disturbing is the fact noted by law enforcement officers, teachers and concerned parents that some adults actively encourage or support the use of alcohol by

their children, supplying beer to minors, allowing alcohol at teen parties on private property, and obstructing law enforcement efforts. There is little, if no, education and awareness of the risks to brain development of youth by either youth or their parents.

3. Court Delays & Procedural Shortcomings in Juvenile Cases. Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties are served by a single County Judge who handles both adult and juvenile cases, and who serves several other counties as well. Court is held only one day per month in Loup and Wheeler Counties, and twice a month in Garfield County. For young people who run afoul of the law, even simple cases often take months to resolve due to delays inherent in the schedule. As the saying goes, "justice delayed is justice denied."

In particular, cases which involve minor or first-time offenses need to be resolved quickly, with consequences which are perceived to be fair, proportionate and certain, with minimum involvement by the Court. An effective juvenile diversion program, with real consequences and opportunities for counseling and supervised, structured community service would be a welcome improvement.

4. Bored Youth. It's a universal problem. In every city, with every group of young people - "There's nothing to do!" is the number-one complaint. In small communities such as Bartlett, Burwell, Erickson and Taylor, it is a fact of life that there are fewer commercial entertainment options than in larger cities. None of these towns has a franchised "fast food" restaurant of any kind. For the most part, the only place to get a meal or snack food after dark is in a tavern or bar. Entertainment and recreation facilities are few and far between.

Burwell, the largest town in the three-county area, has a swimming pool,

golf course and tennis courts, but none are accessible in the winter and there is no organized program of instruction, coaching or team play available to youth. Indoor recreation facilities are extremely limited. Although Burwell has a bowling alley (closed in the summer) and a movie theater which is open most weekends, there are no such facilities in Loup or Wheeler counties.

5. Too Much (Unsupervised) Free Time. Every adult group cited the need for more supervised and constructive activities for youth. Parents, teachers and law enforcement officers all lamented the fact that some kids have too much time on their hands. Closely related to the boredom factor, this problem is magnified during the Summer and at other times when school is not in session. With no organized activities to attend, teenagers tend to gather in groups to "hang out" in parking lots, "cruise the square," circling aimlessly in downtown areas, or driving to nearby towns just for something to do. All too often, these rites of passage involve high-risk driving behavior and frequently, the consumption of alcohol. Social networking and an interest in internet gambling have been cited as worrisome activities.

Grade school youth go unsupervised and have too much access to risky messages from television or older teens. A \$15.00 charge per month for an after school program in 2003 proved to be an economic barrier for the families most needing this service..

Free time, lack of supervision, access to vehicles and alcohol are factors associated with underage sexual activity and unplanned pregnancies, as well as vandalism and theft, which have been problems in all three counties. 'Booze Cruising" on country roads have made for dangerous driving by underage adults as well as licensed youth and have made rural mailboxes an easy target for unsupervised teenagers looking for excitement. Sign damage and theft by

juveniles has been a big headache for property owners and law officers, but investigation and prosecution can be difficult in villages and counties where the law enforcement presence may consist of a single officer patrolling the entire county.

6. Lack of Adult Supervision. Many times, young people are left without adequate supervision because their parents are simply unavailable. Often the cause is basically economic - all of the adult members of the household may be required to work outside the home in order to provide the basic necessities of life. One or more parents may be physically absent from the home due to death, illness or divorce. For youngsters who are not involved in high-school sports or extracurricular activities, few adult-supervised after-school programs are available. This scarcity particularly impacts elementary-school age children.

Where no parent is available but a grandparent is part of the household, the grandparent often assumes the child-rearing function. However, it is not unusual for children 12 or 13 years of age or even younger to be left to fend for themselves, preparing their own meals, getting themselves to and from school, performing housecleaning duties, and supervising younger siblings. Discussion group participants reported numerous examples of young people left without adult supervision late into the night while the parent(s) worked late shifts or spent time socializing in local taverns.

School officials identify lack of parental supervision as a major factor affecting truancy, low commitment to school, and school dropout rates.

7. Limited Employment Opportunity. Teens and young people seeking employment to supplement family income or provide spending money for recreation or personal pursuits are faced with a grim reality: job opportunities in

Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties - especially non-farm part-time positions, are extremely limited, and without a car and a driver's license, there are few transportation options. In a tight job market, juveniles compete with adults for the positions that do exist. Many jobs which traditionally were performed by youngsters, such as lawn care, snow removal, newspaper routes and restaurant wait-staff, are now sought by adult heads of households. A few positions are open to school-aged teens in area grocery stores and nursing homes, but for many young people, working outside the home is just not an option.

8. Poverty, Low Economic Prospects, and Poor Financial Skills. U.S. Census 2000 figures report that for families with children under 5 years of age, 13.0% of Garfield County residents, 25% of Loup County inhabitants and 39.1% of those living in Wheeler County are living below the poverty level. *Loup and Wheeler Counties are among the 50 poorest counties in the nation* as measured by average Adjusted Gross Income reported on federal tax returns for the year 2000. Only five counties in the United States reported lower income figures than Loup County for that year. Nine of the bottom 20 counties were in Nebraska and neighboring South Dakota.

Naturally, such a negative economic picture affects families and youth. According to figures furnished by the Garfield County Court Clerk/Magistrate for the most recent three-year period, legal counsel was provided at state expense in 100 percent of juvenile cases in which the juvenile or parent was represented by counsel, because they were unable to afford a lawyer. The Garfield County Attorney reports that during the same period, bad check cases outnumbered all other non-traffic cases *combined*.

Protective Factors

After stating their problems and concerns for our youth and identifying risks that contribute to the problems, each participant was asked to name helpful factors already in place and available to the communities.

Schools and School Activities

All three counties are fortunate to have successful, adequately funded schools in place. Participants felt that our schools are doing a good job and are producing quality graduates who are well prepared to enter college or begin careers in agriculture or business. High school faculty and staff are generally well respected and highly regarded. Each of the three high schools systems can point to faculty members and programs which have received statewide recognition for excellence. They are also able to point to the School Prevention Coordinators, even though they are now only part-time, as being a success. The schools have reported positive results in the science-based strategies taught but also in the involvement these coordinators have had with the youth. They have been able to spend more time with “at-risk” students and have been able to work on an improved interest in school and activities among many of the youth. Having a paid Youth Advisory Board leader has increased the number of youth involved in having an interest and working on abuse issues.

In all three systems, school programs and activities are a major source of entertainment and recreation not only for students and their immediate families, but for the entire community. Many social events are centered around high school sports and extracurricular activities, and the achievements of students in each community are a source of pride for the entire town.

For many students, involvement in after-school athletics and activities is both a source and an outlet for energy and enthusiasm. Considerable time and energy is invested in these activities by students, and oftentimes by their parents and friends as well.

On the other hand, school administrators and boards of education are facing severe budget constraints. In an era of increased financial pressures, extracurricular activities and “non-essential” course curricula are increasingly subject to the budgetary axe. Several participants lamented the loss of traditional classes in home economics and life skills, pointing out that for many children, this training is not available at home or elsewhere.

Faith-Based Activities

As in most communities, many young people are involved in church activities and youth groups, meeting weekly or more often for lessons, study and social interaction. In addition to church-affiliated youth groups, some students are active in spiritually-oriented interfaith groups such as Bible study groups and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Through such groups, kids are exposed to positive messages which can help build confidence and a sense of purpose. Several of the local churches have expressed an interest in helping with an after school program by providing space and volunteers.

Character-Building Programs

Integrated into the school curricula, character-building programs such as *Character Counts* and *D.A.R.E.* seek to provide young people with tools to assess troublesome situations, make informed wise choices, and avoid harmful associations. A part time School Prevention Coordinator in each school system

allows science based strategies to be implemented; these Coordinators also seek to establish a relationship with the students and impart positive messages and the education of risk behaviors.

Vocational Clubs

Vocational organizations such as the Future Farmers of America (FFA), and rodeo clubs provide important activities and opportunities for youth with an interest or background in agriculture.

B.A.D.D

A number of years ago, a group of concerned parents helped to organize an extracurricular group known as *Burwell Against Drinking and Drugs*.

B.A.D.D., as it is known, sponsors alcohol and drug-free teen dances on a regular basis throughout the year. These events are very popular, especially with younger teens, and attendance has been gratifying to sponsors. The dances, which are held in Burwell, draw large numbers of teens from surrounding communities, including Valley and Custer counties as well as Garfield, Loup and Wheeler.

GLW Youth Advisory Team

In 2008 a Youth Advisory Team was formed with local adult supervision. This group is active, once a month, in discussing abuse issues and planning fun, alternate activities. They have made floats for the local parades and worked on Red Ribbon Week, help plan news releases and spoke on the radio. Although this group is new, they have a full calendar of ideas for the upcoming year.

Law Enforcement Liaison

Area law enforcement officers and firemen have made a special effort to maintain a good rapport with teens, and in general, they are respected and well-regarded by the kids. This good relationship has paid off in Burwell, where incidents of mischief and vandalism, once a problem, are now considered rare. Volunteer firemen patrol the streets of Burwell at Halloween, passing out candy and keeping watch to prevent vandalism and property damage.

Community-Based Wraparound

Beginning in 2000, a Community-Based Wraparound Program has been established in Burwell to provide community-based help for children and families in need of individualized assistance. A companion School-Based Wraparound serves to coordinate services for youth with serious mental health issues affecting school performance. Although intended to serve all of Garfield, Loup and Wheeler counties, the community-based program has been constrained by funding and travel limitations, with the result that most services have been provided in the Burwell area. 2009 will be the last year of funding for this program but the needs will be assimilated through the School Prevention Coordinators, Burwell Food Pantry, the GLWCC office, and hopefully through an after school program.

Food Pantries

Community food pantries have provided invaluable aid to low-income residents in the three-county area. Privately operated by churches and charities, staffed by volunteers and disbursing provisions provided through the generosity of area residents, these informal agencies have provided desperately

needed food, grocery vouchers, clothing and household essentials to their neighbors-in-need. Often, the beneficiaries have been families with children who would have gone hungry without the help.

Public Housing and Social Services

A number of public housing units In the Burwell area are available to low-income families at rental rates based on income levels, through the Burwell Housing Authority. In addition, social services agencies such as Central Nebraska Community Services (CNCS), Region III Behavioral Health Services, and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services provide various forms of assistance to qualified applicants, including families with children.

Counseling

Mental health and substance abuse counseling services are available on a limited basis from private practitioners, or under contract with agencies such as the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Gaps/Needs

A comparison of the Risk Factors identified by discussion participants with the strengths and resources listed as Protective Factors makes it evident that a number of gaps exist – there are a number of holes in the safety net.

In the four domains listed in the Nebraska Risk & Protective Factor Student Survey, there are several risk factors that remain larger than the state percentages. For the Community Domain; Laws& Norms favoring drug use and perceived availability of drugs are larger. In the Family Domain; Poor Family Management and in the School domain; Low Commitment to School are larger. For the peer-individual domain; Attitudes Favorable to alcohol and drug abuse and low perceived of risk are the largest percentages. All of these areas need further education for both youth and their parents. In order to bring down these percentages more time and effort must be spent.

Having a centrally located office for the GLW Children's Council and full time staff enables information to flow to the public as well as give voice to the Council and their message. This is a help to some youth and families, yet for other juveniles, important resources such as mental health counseling or specialized skill training are effectively unavailable because services are provided only at service delivery points or educational facilities at distant sites, and they don't have reliable or affordable transportation.

While school athletic and extracurricular programs provide valuable support for many young people, a small but significant number of kids are falling through the cracks. For children who are not involved in athletics due to physical limitations, insufficient talent or inclination, the spectrum of available activities is narrowed considerably.

Parents, teachers and other discussion group participants feel there is a need for more supervised, structured activities for juveniles, both grade school and high school age, especially after school, on weekends and during summer school breaks, when working parents are not available and productive jobs are hard to come by. In particular, there is a need for new or expanded vocational clubs and activities for youth who may not be college-bound, but do not plan to pursue a career in agriculture, and for kids who are not involved in sports.

For youth and their parents who are struggling to make ends meet and need help with basic life skills, a series of short, low-cost classes or seminars would be a big help.

Participants at Burwell suggested more organized lifetime sports activities such as golf, tennis and soccer programs, or a pee-wee football team. They also thought kids need affordable after-school day care and a safe place to go to “hang out” and listen to music.

Loup county participants noted that the Village of Taylor already has a community center, but lacks funds and personnel to provide needed supervision. They also noted a need for funds to support affordable after-school day care for working parents. Other ideas, as reported before, included a paintball court, car club, more teen dances, and adding frisbee golf to the park.

In Wheeler County there was little change in the needs over the past three years. Participants continued to see the need for a recreation center or gathering place with youth activities and equipment such as a pool table, air hockey, etc. A center could include a place to get ice cream and snacks. With adult sponsorship, the center could be staffed by youth, providing productive

part-time employment and some extra spending money for area youth.

Realistically, counties and communities in the region cannot turn to local private donations for substantial financial support because, frankly, those sources don't exist within these counties. Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties lack a retail or manufacturing base to draw on, and the agricultural core industry is caught in a major economic squeeze. Efforts to identify charitable foundations or similar organizations which might serve as funding sources have produced few prospects and no commitments to date.

In Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties, participants felt that increased law enforcement efforts are needed. Especially in Garfield and Loup county where the Calamus Reservoir is host to 350,000 to 400,000 visitors each year, law enforcement enhancement and presence is needed. There area only so many places in a large county that law enforcement can be seen at one time. Many of the MIP"S come from youth outside of our area and publicity concerning enforcement needs to be provided. "Pasture Parties" and "booze cruising" are common entertainments for youth. The use of cell phones alerts youth as to the locations of law enforcement and again, law enforcement can't be everywhere. There is a need for more education for youth, as well as their parents, as to the dangers of drinking and driving and the brain development of youth involved with alcohol and drugs. Law Enforcement needs to be involved with this education. There is a need for a Diversion Program for education as well as to contain the county budgets. Additional compliance checks and shoulder taps are needed. Law enforcement agencies in all three counties have a lot of ground to cover, with serious limitations on budget and resources.

Although budget constraints and a shortage of qualified officers may limit the counties' ability to expand law enforcement presence in the three counties, community cooperation could make it possible for existing officers to serve more

effectively. "Neighborhood Watch" - type groups have been effective in other areas, where citizens organized and combined their resources to detect and report unlawful or suspicious activity, helping to overcome some of the obstacles confronting jurisdictions with hundreds of square miles of area patrolled by a lone sheriff or deputy.

None of these counties now has an authorized court diversion program for juveniles who get into trouble with the law. Such a plan could benefit youth who commit minor or first-time offenses. In all likelihood, none of the three counties can justify or support the cost of such a program based solely on cases generated within the county, but a combined plan utilizing the shared resources of all three counties may be feasible.

Being able to measure and show that our efforts are working has been limited. The Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey has been our main measurement tool. A plan to measure all of the efforts involved is being facilitated by a new, part time, Local Evaluator.

Solutions

It is evident that there is no single solution or set of solutions that will solve all of the problems identified in Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties. The difficulties and frustrations experienced by youth and parents in these three rural Nebraska counties are not unique - and to the extent that they stem from harsh economic reality and geographic isolation, with long distances from commercial shopping and entertainment centers, the difficulties may literally "come with the territory."

Much can be done, though, to improve the situation and help to make rural and small-town life a bit more interesting and satisfying for our young people. First of all, we need to build upon our strengths - preserving the resources we have in the three-county area, taking full advantage of them and making them fully accessible to the broadest possible constituency. Secondly, we need to expand the range of those resources and services by drawing on our own communities and seeking out new resources as they become available from public and private sources.

- Problem A. Awareness and Access to Activities and Services, and
- Problem B. Supervision, Accountability and Skill Development

The counties, in corporation with the GLW Children's Council, now provide a centrally located, fully staffed office that is used to coordinated all GLWCC activities, write and administer grants and serve as a clearinghouse for youth and parents in identifying and accessing needed resources, as well as helping to make them aware of alcohol, tobacco and other drug abuse, youth activities and opportunities.

Together, they also employ part time youth prevention coordinators in

each school to implement science based and proven strategies. They cooperate with the prevention coordinators, law enforcement, GAP (Gambling Abuse) Coordinator, Youth Advisory Teams and others to serve as additional resources for youth and their parents.

The majority of funding for GLWCC is provided from the Drug Free Community Grant (Capacity building), Region 3 Mental Health Services (School Prevention Coordinator's salary) and the Nebraska Crime Commission Juvenile Aid funds (\$3300.00 for Garfield, Loup & Wheeler counties – used for the Start Smart Halsey Retreat for 7th graders from all three counties) .

Lowering the percentages of the risk factors noted by the Nebraska Risk & Protective Factor Student Survey can be more easily facilitated by working in several areas: 1. Increasing to full time the positions of School Prevention Coordinators and providing them with more education, 2. Providing free After School supervision for grade school youth 3. Providing more education and classes to youth and families concerning the risks of alcohol and drug abuse, the risk to youth brain development, and the dangers of drinking and driving or riding in a car with an impaired driver and 4. Improving the measurement of strategies used, initiating new survey instruments provided by the Local Evaluator and spending time to discover "How do we know we are making a difference".

Full implementation of these positions and classes will do a great deal to address the problems identified in the first two priority groups identified above.

Problem C. Law Enforcement Issues

Efforts can be made to improve cooperation and support among law enforcement agencies serving the three counties, continuing efforts to deal with underage alcohol and drug use, and improve relations between law enforcement

officials and the general public, including juveniles.

Law enforcement agencies must work together to maximize effectiveness. Police and Sheriff's officers should meet regularly with each other to coordinate efforts and share information, ideas and resources. Agencies should strive to maintain a friendly, helpful presence in each community and school system.

Law enforcement enhancement and providing part time law enforcement, to educate parents and youth would be a great benefit to all three counties. Continued Compliance Checks, coordinated with the Nebraska State Patrol, will continue the efforts to reduce underage drinking. Funding for the above is limited, so sustainability is always a concern. Continuing education for law enforcement on ATOD abuse issues is necessary to keep the officers informed and enthused.

In the future, the counties may wish to combine their resources to create a jointly operated court diversion program for juvenile and first-time offenders in non-felony cases.

Part III

PRIORITY AREAS & STRATEGIES

PROBLEMS

According to law enforcement officers and prosecutors, our area is not exempt from the scourge of marijuana, methamphetamine and other illegal drugs, nor from the misuse of prescription medications. But without question, the drugs most often used and abused by adults and young people alike are alcohol and tobacco. From bi-annual, statewide student surveys which include local school data, focus group polls and individual interviews, it is clear that our youth start to drink alcohol and use cigarettes or “smokeless” tobacco at a very early age, and consumption increases over time. There are indications of a trend for our children to engage in “binge drinking” even before they reach high school. In this isolated area where travel is often a daily requirement, survey data and law enforcement experience shows that many of our youth are driving under the influence, and many more are riding as passengers with others who have been drinking.

Area young people use tobacco and drink more alcohol, earlier and more often than their counterparts in many other areas, often resulting in poor performance at school, reduced employment opportunities and diminished earning capacity, in addition to greater risk of injury to themselves and others and the very real prospect of alcohol-related disease and addiction. From current research on brain chemistry, we are increasingly aware that early exposure to alcohol and drugs can adversely affect childhood brain development, causing permanent, irreparable damage. It is also clear that early acceptance and use of alcohol and tobacco can be a precursor to use of more sinister drugs and other high-risk, antisocial behaviors.

Such behavior is perceived by too many adults in the community as a low-risk, socially acceptable “rite of passage”. In the current environment, parents who condone or permit alcohol or drug use by minors often go unchallenged, creating the impression that such activity is socially acceptable. Although most adults surveyed actually expressed disapproval of youthful drinking and drug use, many were surprised to learn that other

parents share their concerns. The perception of teenagers and parents alike seems to be that underage use of tobacco, alcohol and “minor” drugs such as marijuana is not considered a serious problem. Particularly disturbing is the fact that some parents actively encourage underage drinking, supplying beer to minors, allowing alcohol at teen parties on private property and obstructing law enforcement efforts. Often, parents suffer from denial, refusing to acknowledge that their own children are involved with alcohol or drugs.

Most of those surveyed expressed the opinion that teenagers’ attitudes toward use of alcohol and other drugs are modeled on behavior they have witnessed at home, in the community and in the mass media. Rodeos, often sponsored by the alcohol and tobacco industries, are an important part of the local culture, and the iconic image of the Marlboro cowboy is still a role model in this area. Many young people of both sexes take pride in the act of smoking, as well as displaying the distinctive round imprint of the smokeless tobacco tin in the back jeans pocket.

DATA COLLECTION

Baseline Data for the four GPRA measures was collected as part of the 2007 *Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Survey*. Results mirror anecdotal information gathered from other sources. To assess community attitudes about alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) use, we examined the *Three Year Comprehensive Juvenile Services Plans (2003-2005 and 2006-2008)* for Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties, reviewed comments expressed at a combined Town Hall meeting on underage drinking, and conducted extensive interviews with law enforcement and court system officers, government officials, church leaders, high school government classes, student councils, church groups, Rotary and other focus groups

DRUG USED	Lifetime Use				Past 30 Days			
	6 th	8 th	10 th	12 th	6 th	8 th	10 th	12 th
Alcohol	15%	50%	50%	85%	8%	12%	18%	28%
Cigarettes	5%	17%	18%	48%	0%	8%	9%	19%
Chewing Tobacco	5%	19%	30%	38%	0%	13%	18%	25%
Marijuana	0%	5%	8%	18%	0%	2%	5%	9%
Inhalants	5%	5%	4%	3%	0%	5%	0%	0%
Prescription Drugs	0%	5%	9%	10%	0%	3%	3%	0%
Other Drugs	0%	4%	6%	6%	0%	0%	3%	5%
Binge Drinking					0%	0%	8%	18%

Risk Factor	6 th Grade		8 th Grade		10 th Grade		12 th Grade	
	County	State	County	State	County	State	County	State
Laws and Norms Favor Drug Use	50%	32%	25%	29%	30%	40%	40%	40%
Perceived Availability Of Drugs	48%	40%	35%	29%	18%	19%	18%	38%
Parent Attitudes Favor Drug Use	17.5%	12%	21%	22%	22%	42%	38%	39%
Low Perceived Risk Of Drug Use	42%	60%	82%	71%	73%	72%	75%	60%
Low Commitment To School	45%	40%	63%	41%	44%	25%	25%	42%

Source: 2007 Nebraska Risk and Protective Factors Student Survey

The average Age of Onset of alcohol use is 12.6 years, and reported use of Alcohol and tobacco increases steadily and significantly between 6th and 12th grades and binge drinking rises from 10th to 12th grade. . The use of inhalants is more common in the younger grades, probably do to availability and low cost. Frequency of use past 30 days – Eighth graders reported higher than average use for alcohol, cigarettes and chewing tobacco. Tenth grade students indicated lower than state average use for alcohol, cigarettes, chewing tobacco and inhalants, and Seniors reported higher usage rates for cigarettes and chewing tobacco, which is better than 2005. Perception of risk or harm – Use of alcohol, tobacco and marijuana is considered low-risk and low priority by a significant minority of adults and youth. With only six local law enforcement officers available to patrol over 1,700 square miles in three counties, there is a lack of natural surveillance, and most offenses go undetected. Underage use or misuse of alcohol, cigarettes and inhalants, as well as marijuana and other illegal drugs, is made easier by the fact that these substances are readily available from older friends, siblings, and sometimes parents. Perception of disapproval of use by parents – 17.5% of area sixth graders and 42% of high school seniors reported parental attitudes that favor drug use.

Data also showed that Laws & Norms Favor Drug Use are 50% for the 6th grade and only lower to 40% by 12th grade and yet higher than the state average. There is a steady increase of driving after drinking and riding in a car with a drinking driver. Over half of each class surveyed drank alcohol in their home.

We clearly have a problem.

GARFIELD, LOUP & WHEELER COUNTY PRIORITY AREAS AND STRATEGIES

PRIORITY/ GOAL ONE:

Establish and strengthen collaboration among communities, private nonprofit agencies and Federal, State and local governments to support the efforts of community coalitions to prevent and reduce substance abuse among youth.

Objective 1A. Continue to build public confidence in the GLW Children's Council, Inc. by instituting and growing capable leadership, implementing strong internal control systems, and continuing to increase the capacity of the office by adding equipment, supplies and necessary items to work effectively.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Retain a Summer Assistant to help in the office and to help facilitate summer programs. Add equipment to office as necessary. Continue to update financial controls and reporting procedures for evaluation by Local Evaluator.

In Place: The previous 3-year plan indicated the need for a central office. The office is in place and fully staffed, but there is still a need to improve the abilities of facilitation.

Timeline: The Assistant would work for the three months of the summer, helping to develop our "Social Norms" campaign, "Be a Hero" campaign and work with the Youth Advisory Board to facilitate our goals.

Resources needed: Funding is in place for the Summer Assistant.

GLWCC is applying for the Enhancement Grant to supply materials, wide-format printer and food for the summer youth activities. The Youth Board is funded entirely by donations which limits their ability to offer many of their ideas.

Objective 1B. Continue to maximize community stakeholder participation in goal setting and strategy building efforts.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Offer a community wide parent/adult survey for all three counties.

In Place: GLWCC has a wonderful working relationship with all three schools. Both GLWCC and the schools have the human resources to deliver the survey.

Gap: The Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey is offered every 2 years but we do not have data from a current parent/adult survey.

Timeline: GLWCC would plan to administer the survey during the first “Report Card Period” in the fall of 2009 in each of the schools, 7-12 grades.

Resources Needed: Bach Harrison (who administered the Nebraska Risk and Protective Factor Student Survey) has agreed to help us develop, print, and return results to us for \$2.00 per person; estimated 1500 surveys @\$3000.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Continue to offer community prevention events (Town Hall Meeting) for parents and families, with a regional speaker.

In Place: GLWCC has the expertise and resources from previous Town Hall Meetings to continue this program.

Gap: Every two years the Town Hall Meetings are administered yet, there is an ongoing need for parent education; 2009's meeting has not yet been planned.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Offer a Spirituality and Prevention Conference for the three counties and surrounding area.

In Place: The GLWCC staff has the human resources and contacts to begin to collaborate with the Faith community. Printing costs are available through the office.

Gap: There has never been a Spirituality & Prevention Conference in this area. It is still a struggle to get the faith community involved. More education and understanding would help to remove this barrier.

Timeline: GLWCC plans to hold the Spirituality and Prevention conference in the fall of 2009.

Resources Needed: Speaker and travels funds are needed as well as folders, paper, etc.

Objective 1C. Continue to improve parental awareness of underage substance abuse, and help parents communicate to their youth that substance abuse and gambling abuse is illegal, unhealthy and unacceptable.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Offer free after school supervision for grade school youth.

In Place: The GLWCC office and staff can provide record keeping and files. A Local church would supply the space and other church's ½ of the food cost.

Gap: There are no supervised after school programs for the grade school youth in any of the three counties.

Timeline: As soon as resources could be allocated the after school program would begin.

Resources Needed: This new program would need funding for the staff, supplies and help with ½ of the cost of the food for the children.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Provide more education youth, public and families.

In Place: GLWCC can provide educational material, support and some local speakers..

Gap: There is little funding to offer classes, educational material and programs in our three communities

Timeline: On going

Resources Needed: Funding is needed to purchase evidence based programs and materials as well as funding to provide well known speakers and travel expenses.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Plan and implement a media campaign as well as a social norms campaign to educate the public on substance and gambling abuse.

In Place: The staff of GLWCC has attended two social norms trainings.

Gap: GLWCC has not had the funding to promote a large, three county media campaign on the dangers of underage abuse or to work on a three county social norms campaign.

Timeline: Summer of 2009 or whenever funding is available.

Resources needed: GLWCC would like to send 5 area coaches to John Underwood's Life of an Athlete Training, and have them return to train all of the coaches in our three county area as well as other counties. Parents would also be invited to the training and then we would plan to kick off our Community Hero campaign in all three counties.

Objective 1D. Continue with plans for the growth and sustainability of the GLWCC

- *Strategy/Activity:* Continue work on evaluation of GLWCC's sustainability Plan using the Finance Model.

In Place: The Director of GLWCC and two coalition members have received Sustainability Training and will facilitate training to the GLWCC Board and Coalition

Gap: GLWCC needs to continue pre/post surveys and antidotal surveys and focus groups for use by GLWCC, schools and law enforcement to gather information on what is needed, how we are doing and what we have and can accomplish..

Timeline: On going

Resources Needed: Funding is needed to continue training and to have members of the GLWCC Board attend national trainings to further their

education on what constitutes a good Coalition and learn about building a better Coalition and the work they do by using the Nebraska and Kansas University Toolkit.

PRIORITY/GOAL TWO:

Reduce substance abuse among youth and, over time, among adults by addressing local factors that increase the risk of substance abuse and promoting factors that minimize the risk of substance abuse.

Objective 2A: Increase student involvement in coalition strategy building and programs.

- *Strategy/Activities:* Continue to increase the capacity of the Youth Advisory Board by inviting youth from all school systems to join the Board.
In Place: GLWCC has hired an Advisory Youth Board Leader on a part-time, contract basis.
Gap: A Youth Advisory Board has formed only in Garfield county.
Timeline: On going; efforts are being made to facilitate Youth Boards in the other two counties.
Resources Needed: Funding to hire two more Youth Leaders; funding for training of the Leaders to better facilitate the education.
- *Strategy/Activities:* Increase the ability of the Youth Advisory Board to fund events, be provided with supplies and travel for training.
In Place: Garfield County has an active Youth board that could help facilitate other newly formed boards.
Gap: Although the Youth Advisory Board has held fund-raisers they still lack the necessary funds to promote floats and events that could draw youth from all three counties. They feel they would be better able to educate other youth if they had more training.

Timeline: On going

Resources Needed: Funding for training and seminars for youth; funding to help facilitate their floats and other campaigns.

Objective 2B: Promote knowledge building, advocacy training, youth empowerment and substance abuse prevention strategies among youth.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Continue to sponsor the annual Youth Summit and T.R.U.S.T. Course for seventh grade students from all three school systems.

In Place: This retreat has been held for the past three years in collaboration with the Nebraska GLW Extension Service.

Gap: For the past two years GLWCC has held the Halsey Retreat for 7 grade students; 98% attended.. The three counties combine their County Aid dollars, in the amount of \$3,300, to produce this Retreat. We are not getting the volunteers to produce, speak and run the course as previously because we are not able to pay their mileage. There needs to be a larger emphasis on ATOD abuse offered during the retreat. Feedback from parents and students tells us we need to continue this program.

Timeline: On going, every August before the start of school

Resources Needed: The County Aid dollars for the three counties combined is a small amount, funding is needed to help cover the costs of travel, speakers and other materials as the school budgets are getting tighter and they are not able to supply as much funding to help make up the difference for bus travel, etc.

Objective 2C: Reduce youth access to alcohol in Garfield, Loup and Wheeler Counties.

- *Strategy/Activities:* Maintain School Coordinators in all three county schools and increase their time to full-time.

In Place: Region 3 Behavioral Health supplies funding for three part-time School Coordinators, one in each of the schools.

Gap: GLWCC no longer has the SICA funding so we are not able to hire the School Coordinators at full time. The schools were previously very pleased with the evidenced based and proven strategies the Coordinators were able to implement. Those strategies have been reduced and we are not able to reach as many students as before.

Timeline: On going, as funding permits.

Resources Needed: Funding is needed to retain our School Coordinators at a full time position as they are all looking for full time work.

- *Strategy/Activity:* Provide enhanced law enforcement presence in all communities by retaining law enforcement on a contract basis.

In Place: GLWCC has a good working relationship with the three county law enforcement agencies and they all express an interest in the goals of GLWCC..

Gap: Each county is staffed by one County Sheriff; one has a part time deputy. To have a larger presence in the communities and schools it would be necessary to hire them on a contract basis as their duty/volunteer time is limited due to their schedules and the distances they have to travel.

Timeline: On going

Resources Needed: Funding is needed to hire law enforcement on a part-time, contract basis, to work in the schools and on other projects with the GLWCC staff.

- *Strategy/Activities:* Offer a Diversion Program, hire a Diversion Coordinator and use the program, Alternate Routes.

In Place: The Garfield County Attorney has offered an office in his building to house a GLW Diversion Coordinator.

Gap: None of the three counties have been financially able to offer a Diversion Program. Officers have to take into account the county budgets when making arrests and looking forward to court appointed attorneys. We would be able to have a better idea of the underage drinking in our

area if youth could be arrested and sent to a Diversion Program.

Timeline: When funding permits

Resources Needed: Funding is needed to hire a Diversion Coordinator, Evaluator, for training , mileage, supply materials, desk and computer.

Evaluation and Sustainability

1. The goals, objectives and performance indicators set forth in this plan are only one set yardsticks by which success can be evaluated. In the end, the true measure of success will be whether the youth programs in Garfield, Loup and Wheeler counties are actually helping juveniles and their families. If successful, the plan will evolve and grow by referral, as the community Wraparound program has done. When a youngster in trouble or a family in need receives really useful help, the word travels quickly in small communities. School faculty and administrators, law enforcement officials, mental health professionals and clergy are glad to recommend a good program, and they won't tolerate a poor one.
2. For law enforcement agencies, improved communication, better cooperation and increased community support are key elements in the effort to curb inappropriate, illegal or socially harmful behavior among juveniles, and protect young people from harm of all sorts.
3. The GLW Children's Council coalition includes over 70 individuals with a special interest in children and families in the area. As part of their larger mission to assist youth and families, the governing board meets with the Director at least quarterly to review programs, assess progress, suggest improvements, and assist with problems as they may develop. Members of the Council provide useful information and advice, and serve as a valuable liaison with various community organizations and individuals, including law enforcement officers.
4. The local Evaluator will work with the GLW Director to evaluate all personnel, programs and progress and report to the Board of Directors of the Counsel as well as to the county boards.

Budget Considerations

Current and previous county spending on juvenile issues is not readily determined, as for the most part, spending for juveniles has not been separately identified. To date, all three counties have experienced relatively low levels of serious juvenile crime. Cases of juvenile or child neglect and abuse have been handled through the juvenile court system, where services and funding have been provided through the Department of Health and Human Services.

Implementation of plans for a Juvenile Diversion Program, enhanced law enforcement and an after school program will require a substantial financial commitment. In all likelihood, the counties will not be able to fund these positions and programs without outside assistance in the form of grants from public or private sources of funding. Enhanced private support through matching funds, pooling of resources and more volunteer time will help to reduce the total amount of funding.

Part IV

Community Team Members

Community Team Members

Linda Buhlke
TierOne Bank
P.O. Box 610
Burwell, NE 68823

John Schere
Gambling Grant Coordinator
P.O. Box 67
Burwell, NE 68823

Peggy Schneider
Taylor Made Hair Designs
82201 Kent Road
Burwell, NE 68823

Lynn Franzen
Burwell Economic Development
P.O. Box 131
Burwell, NE 68823

Bonita Zeigler
Burwell Food Pantry
45859 825th Road
Burwell, NE 68823

Howard Fairbairn
Retired
P.O. Box 332
Burwell, NE 68823

Judy Simpson
Clerk Magistrate - Garfield Co.
P.O. Box 338
Burwell, NE 68823

Sara Gideon
Burwell Dental Clinic
46488 Hwy96
Burwell, NE 68823

Holly Mann
Nurse/Burwell Massage Therapy
P.O. Box 995
Burwell, NE 68823

Ben Hughes
City of Burwell Police Officer
P.O. Box 503
Burwell, NE 68823

Steve Delashmutt
Tribune 2000
P.O. Box 547
Burwell, NE 68823

Marie Gumb
Individual/Parent
83609 473rd Ave

Burwell, NE 68823

Brenda Holmquist
Burwell Family Practice
P.O. Box 804
Burwell, NE 68823

Marcie Smith
Teacher - Burwell HS
P.O. Box 670
Burwell, NE 68823

Luke Gideon
Teacher/Coach - Burwell HS
P.O. Box 670
Burwell, NE 68823

Susan Goochey
Teacher - Burwell Elementary
P.O. Box 777
Burwell, NE 68823

Sandra Mann
Loup Co. School Prevention Coord
82417 461st Ave.
Burwell, NE 68823

Linda Senn
Counselor - Burwell HS
P.O. Box 670

Burwell, NE 68823
Dave Owen
Principal - Burwell Jr-Sr High School
P.O. Box 670
Burwell, NE 68823

Pat Andrews
Teacher - ESU 10 School
P.O. Box 841
Burwell, NE 68823

Michelle Archibeque
Garfield Co. School Prevention Coord.
46654 Hwy 96
Burwell, NE 68823

Linda Frysek
Burwell Chamber of Commerce
P.O. Box 131
Burwell, NE 68823

Larry Donner
Garfield County Sheriff
P.O. Box 455
Burwell, NE 68823

Pastor Alan Petersen
First Congregational Church
P.O. Box 534
Burwell, NE 68823

Jo Cox
Lutheran Church
46398 Hwy 91

Burwell, NE 68823

Chuck Cone
Loup Basin Health Dept.
P.O. Box 995
Burwell, NE 68823

Shelby Koncel
Student - LCHS
45577 Hwy 91
Burwell, NE 68823

Jill Petersen
Student - LCHS
83714 459th Ave.
Burwell, NE 68823

Jordan Anderson
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 134
Burwell, NE 68823

Lexi Eddy
Student - BHS
P. O. Box 591
Burwell, NE 68823

Megan Cassidy
Student - BHS
644 J Street
Burwell, NE 68823

Karissa Owen
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 506
Burwell, NE 68823

Lanae Maxson
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 382
Burwell, NE 68823

Jake Holmquist

Student - BHS
P.O. Box 804
Burwell, NE 68823

Dillon Nelson
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 391
Burwell, NE 68823

Rachelle Plock
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 788
Burwell, NE 68823

Mary Drudik
LBHD Tobacco Prevention
P.O. Box 995

Burwell, NE 68823

Stacey Klimek
Nurse - LBHD
P.O. Box 572
Burwell, NE 68823

Rebecca Gaukel
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 177
Burwell, NE 68823

Raleen Beal
Sandhills Physical Therapy
P.O. Box 129
Burwell, NE 68823

Bob Lee
GLWCC Children's Council - Eval.
Officer
P.O. Box 571
Burwell, NE 68823

Sandy Cronk
Individual
45266 Hwy 91
Taylor, NE 68879

Makenna Brunken
Student - BHS
42237 Hatchery Road
Burwell, NE 68823

Scott O'Neil
Union Bank & Trust
P.O. Box A
Taylor, NE 68879

Shirley Armbruster
Counselor - Loup Co. High School
P.O. Box 170
Taylor, NE 68879

Rusty Ruppert
Principal - Loup Co. High School
P. O. Box 170
Taylor, NE 68879

Trevor Kraus
Garfield Co. Deputy Sheriff
P.O. Box 104
Taylor, NE 68879

Hanna Dilsaver
Student - LCHS
P.O. Box
Burwell, NE 68823

Virginia Knapp
Certified Counselor
314 South 14th Str. #104
Ord, NE 68862

Father Tom Ryan
Catholic Church
527 North 19th Street
Ord, NE 68862

Melissa Dearmont
Counselor - Midwest Country Clinic
HC 75 Box 149
Rose, NE 68714

Mary Kaminski
CNCS
626 N Street
Loup City, NE 68853

Tiffany Gressley
Region 3 Behavioral Health Systems
P.O. Box 2555
Kearney, NE 68848

Jack Poulsen
Ericson State Bank
P.O. Box 98
Ericson, NE 68637

Lana Kruml
Counselor - Wheeler Central High
School
P.O. Box 68
Bartlett, NE 68622

Adrian Lindsay
Wheeler County Sheriff
P.O. Box 127
Bartlett, NE 68622

Paul Nordhues
Principal/Coach Wheeler Central HS
P.O. Box 56
Bartlett, NE 68622

Chris Olson
Individual/Parent
83806 Stone House Ave.
Bartlett, NE 68622

Sydney Gehl
Student - WCHS
82522 495th Ave.
Ericson, NE 68637

Pat Cone
TierOne Bank
P.O. Box 263
Burwell, NE 68823

Joel Holmquist
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 804
Burwell, NE 68823

Garrett Drudik
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 491
Burwell, NE 68823

CeCelia Carson
Student - SHS
P.O. Box 145
Burwell, NE 68823

Riley Sheets
Student - BHS
P.O. Box 276
Burwell, NE 68823

Melissa Schere
Individual
P.O. Box 67
Burwell, NE 68823

Lindsey Gumb
Student Burwell HS
83609 473rd Ave.
Burwell, NE 68823

Patricia Crandall
Director - GLW Children's Council
P.O. Box 310
Burwell, NE 68823

Sally Hoepker
Assistant Director - GLW Children's
Council
P.O. Box 310
Burwell, NE 68823

Carol White
Fiscal Agent - GLW Children's Council
P.O. Box 310
Burwell, NE 68823

Diana Hurlbert
Individual
P.O. Box 482
Burwell, NE 68823

Ruby Plock
Garfield C. School. Prevention Coord.
P.O. Box 788
Burwell, NE 68823

Rhonda Maxson
NCTC Telephone
P.O. Box 382
Burwell, NE 68823

Lorrie Gaukel
TierOne Bank
P.O. Box 177
Burwell, NE 68823

Carolyn Dexter
Subconn, Inc.
46470 Hwy 96
Burwell, NE 68823

Charlie Goff
Burwell Senior Citizens
46325 Hwy 91
Burwell, NE 68823

Pastor Reeves
Burwell Baptist Church
P.O. Box 10
Burwell, NE 68823

Ann Kelley
Burwell Head Start
P.O. Box 903
Burwell, NE 68823

Danielle Nichols
Student - WCHS
P.O. Box 124
Bartlett, NE 68622

Katie Swett
Student - WCHS
829 West Depot St.
Ericson, NE 68637

JJ Johnny James
KNLV Radio3
205 South 16th St.
Ord, NE 68862

Quiz Graphic Arts
305 South 16th St
Ord, NE 68862

Peggy Fairbairn
Among Friends Daycare
P.O. Box 332
Burwell, NE 68823